

AU/ACSC/NADEEM/AY09

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

RISK MANAGEMENT IN MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty in Partial fulfillment of the Graduation
Requirements

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Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

February 2009

Report Documentation Page		Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.		
1. REPORT DATE APR 2009	2. REPORT TYPE N/A	3. DATES COVERED -
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Risk Management in Media Engagement		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
	5e. TASK NUMBER	
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air Command And Staff College Air University Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
14. ABSTRACT <p>The United States being a super power has global interests. This puts a huge responsibility on the DoD and US military. US Air Force has reached to a point where it can have presence anywhere around the globe in matter of hours. Gulf War I, Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq proved the supremacy of the USAF. But after the kinetic victory the job never finished in the same way on ground. Insurgencies started in both the countries. The US has spent billions of dollars in these two wars but there is frustratingly awful situation. Public opinion in Sept 2001 was different than what it is today. Approval ratings of the US military operations have gone down drastically outside the US. Domestic public opinion is also divided. The wars are going on half way across the globe in a different environment. Cultural context is also an important aspect in winning the public opinion there. Media advancement, as compared to what was there in 1991 during Gulf War I, has played a key role in shaping public opinion. Satellite TV news, internet and revolution in the usage of cell phones have brought unprecedented changes. The historic western advantage of having superiority in news/information dissemination to common people is not there anymore. People all around the world are at par with the west in getting the international news. Ironically the media and the governmental agencies in the US seem to be unaware of the fact that how advanced are the information technology in some of the third world countries. Unless there is a realization here of this fact a plan of tackling public opinion in the affected areas may not be made. News of all levels from tactical to operational to strategic is available to most of the common people everywhere. This makes the life of PA vi personnel more difficult. They have to be in sync with the top leadership's stance on a subject; otherwise their message will lose credibility. For winning public opinion knowledge is the key, knowledge of the target audience, their culture, customs, traditions and language. The paper has made an attempt to bring forward the perception of international media and public about the US and its military operations. Because kinetic win will not be an ultimate victory, success will be when the war of hearts and minds is won.</p>		

15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT SAR	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 34	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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Preface

During ACSC elective selection I had a quick look at most of the topics open to international students. Being a pilot in air force for a long time only operational topics seem a possibility to have a go on. When I had a chance to visit one of the seminar rooms where Lt Col Diane Ficke and Ms Katzenbach of Public Affairs Center of Excellence (PACE) were helping students with “War for Public Opinion” I sat in a corner and listened to them. Then I had a brief exchange of thought and realized that I might be able to give my perspective on the topic. It was not the stuff I might have thought of doing my research on due to my career background, yet I found that public affair personnel job is not easy and when USAF has global operations; it becomes all the more difficult.

During the course of my research I realized how difficult it was to start writing the first line. But, the way PACE staff provided us with right guidance and untiring support in the shape of very bright speakers on the subject, visit to CNN Center in Atlanta and last but not the least, the seminar lectures were invaluable for me to actually finish this daunting task. Months of research, trips to MSFRIC and use of all possible media tools made it possible for me to explore knowledge on the subject. I would specially like to thank MSFRIC staff in helping me finding most of the books and material for my research. I definitely have not come out with a success formula or a solution but what I can claim is that I have been able to bring out the other side’s perspective, which may help PACE in understanding the cultural context and devise a plan of attack.

Abstract

The United States being a super power has global interests. This puts a huge responsibility on the DoD and US military. US Air Force has reached to a point where it can have presence anywhere around the globe in matter of hours. Gulf War I, Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq proved the supremacy of the USAF. But after the kinetic victory the job never finished in the same way on ground. Insurgencies started in both the countries. The US has spent billions of dollars in these two wars but there is frustratingly awful situation. Public opinion in Sept 2001 was different than what it is today. Approval ratings of the US military operations have gone down drastically outside the US. Domestic public opinion is also divided. The wars are going on half way across the globe in a different environment. Cultural context is also an important aspect in winning the public opinion there. Media advancement, as compared to what was there in 1991 during Gulf War I, has played a key role in shaping public opinion. Satellite TV news, internet and revolution in the usage of cell phones have brought unprecedented changes.

The historic western advantage of having superiority in news/information dissemination to common people is not there anymore. People all around the world are at par with the west in getting the international news. Ironically the media and the governmental agencies in the US seem to be unaware of the fact that how advanced are the information technology in some of the third world countries. Unless there is a realization here of this fact a plan of tackling public opinion in the affected areas may not be made. News of all levels from tactical to operational to strategic is available to most of the common people everywhere. This makes the life of PA

personnel more difficult. They have to be in sync with the top leadership's stance on a subject; otherwise their message will lose credibility. For winning public opinion knowledge is the key, knowledge of the target audience, their culture, customs, traditions and language. The paper has made an attempt to bring forward the perception of international media and public about the US and its military operations. Because kinetic win will not be an ultimate victory, success will be when the war of hearts and minds is won.

Introduction

The US Foreign Policy is a reflection of her global status and interests, consequently the requirement to carryout military operations in any part of the world. Joseph Nye in his book Paradox of American Power, says, “Our sphere of concern extends well beyond national boundaries.”¹ The present age makes it clear that no operations domestically or internationally can be successful without favorable public opinion. Media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion. The US government in general and the Armed Forces in particular, for obvious reasons, have a challenge to engage media and have a favorable public opinion. Currently the US military operations are going on in Afghanistan and Iraq; historically the US military operations have occurred outside the main land USA like Europe, Korea, Vietnam, Middle East and Afghanistan.

With media becoming wide-spread and news getting to all parts of the world as quickly as it becomes available to the citizens of the western countries, public opinion in all regions of the world has become more and more significant to the US military operations and especially more important in the affected areas. The other important aspect of having a favorable public opinion is the targeting certain ethnic group like the “Muslim World”. The US population is a little over 300 millions whereas there are 1.2 billion Muslims, 1.1 billion Indians and a huge population elsewhere like Africa and the Far East, whose opinion today matters significantly. “The best thing you can do for the military’s credibility is to show us everything and let us make up our own minds”.² Keeping in view the above stated facts, it has become imperative for the Air Force and the DoD to engage the international/foreign media and win a favorable public opinion for the US operations. This paper would attempt to address how should the Air Force or DOD manage risk with respect to selecting which media and issues it can safely ignore in the interest

of proactively engaging other media or issues? What is the necessity of engaging the International Media, keeping in view the US global interests and operations?

Problem, Background and Significance

In the modern era, people around the world rely on news papers, radio, TV, Satellite TV and the online media through personal computers and other hand held devices for getting news. All the above stated mediums are the result of western innovations. With the world order constantly changing in last over a century until its present stage of unipolarity the Western countries prospered to a level where there became a big contrast in the lifestyle of the Western and Eastern World. The media in the west was moving at a faster rate and sensational news was and is a big sell. But as the Eastern countries started to catch up in technology and the education level of its masses, the awareness and news business gained importance and popularity in those regions, too. With the advent of satellite TV transmissions the masses across the world started getting information at an unprecedented quicker rate. The problem started when the oppressed people in other parts of the world started getting an access to information about the Free World, the world saw Berlin Wall disappearing and fall of the Soviet Empire. The radical Muslims who were used as “Mujahedeen” for fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan were left alone in the mountains of lawless Afghanistan for decades; as they were trained in the art of guerrilla warfare, they remained a dangerous prospect for the civilized world. The events of Gulf War I and the US foreign policy of backing Israel remained a sour point for a number of Muslim countries. Gulf War I, because there was a large Muslim population who favored Saddam and Iraq and were against the presence of the US Forces in Saudi Arabia long after the War was over.

An Anti-US sentiment was growing in that region, the events of USS Cole's attack and bombing of a number US Embassies in Africa in 1998-99 were the indications of what was a possible terrorists' attack on the mainland USA which occurred on Sept 11, 2001. Since then the US has been involved in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for about 8 years now; the public opinion in the US and all around the world was in favor of the US war in Afghanistan, but the war in Iraq had mixed public opinion in the US and all around the world. With the passage of time even domestic public is divided on both the wars for various reasons like the loss of US lives and exorbitant cost of the wars. What remains a point of concern is the public opinion about the US operations in the two countries and all around the world plays a significant role on the outcome of these wars; like hunting down of terrorists especially outside Afghanistan into Pakistan and also from Iraq into Syria requires favorable public opinion in the regions to have success. As the US media mainly focuses the domestic public thus the target audience remain the US population which is far away from the conflict region and much lesser in number and more importantly other than supporting own government and moral of troops, for fighting these two wars, does not contribute anything towards the victory. The audience in those regions, if targeted properly and a favorable opinion is generated, can make the US operations succeed.

The question is how the US Air Force and the DoD can utilize its own media to win the public opinion in those regions. Some possible answers are; having the US media broadcasts using some popular networks of those countries on timesharing basis, especially in their own languages, involvement in their print media by having collaborations with mainstream newspapers and periodicals of those countries' by the US counterparts. If the translations selected portions of US newspapers and periodicals are printed in those newspapers; it would have far reaching effects in the 'way of thinking' of the people there.

The population of Middle East, South Asia and South East Asia is less educated in comparison to the population of the Western Countries. Therefore the understanding in those countries about the world politics and its dynamics is much lesser. This implies a sense of anger in masses there on many incidents, without realizing the need for certain action by the Western Countries and the US in particular. For example the US policy of military action against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had different opinion in Middle East and South Asia. Even people in one country with different social and educational backgrounds had much different opinion. There was a large population which supported Saddam in 1991. The US and Coalition action was not welcomed by a large number of people there. Still most of the educated and upper middle class people in those countries were not in favor of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. Now, after many years in 2009, there is hardly anyone who favors Saddam, because what the world had to see was a tyrant leader who killed many of his own countrymen and ruled the country without any consideration of all the people under his rule. As the events unfold more and more authoritarian style came to light and his policies were a source of discomfort for leaders around the world. His Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which were actually never found, he kept the world speculating, ultimately lost his own life and pushed his country into war for years to come.

Demise of the Soviet Union changed the world order and later events, including Gulf War I, Bosnia, Kosovo and ever volatile Israel-Palestine issue in the face of uni-polarity brought a number of challenges to the US, most notably the changing face of threat to national security. Attacks on the US Embassies in Africa, USS Cole and World Trade Center (1993) were proof of this new threat. Muslim fundamentalists rallied other Muslims mainly in Middle East and Asia on US support of Israel and presence of forces in Middle East. Within the Muslim World there are different schools of thoughts regarding religious customs and traditions, their view on other

religions and governments. Muslims countries are as diverse as Turkey, Bahrain and UAE on one hand which are secular. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan on the other hand have a large number of people who are not tolerant to other religions, governments and even other sects within their own religion. If we see the set of secular Muslim countries, it is interesting to note that they are diverse in themselves. Turkey and UAE are Sunni dominated countries, whereas Bahrain is a Shia dominated country (81% Shias). But, all these countries are forward looking and moderate in their religious outlook. The other set of countries also have similar distribution of sects, like Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan are Sunni majorities countries, Iran is a Shia majority (89% Shias), yet their fundamentalists outweigh moderates. Therefore, there is a complex situation. Osama Bin Laden is a Saudi Sunni Muslim and his aides are also from same sect, thus in other words Al-Qaeda is a Sunni organization. Similar hostile/militant organizations are Hamas and Hezbollah. But again Hamas is Sunni organization and Hezbollah is a Shia organization. This brings me to the point where I would like to contemplate as who is the target audience?

The target audience is common citizens of those countries where these fundamentalists come from or where they operate from. Present era of education and progress does not allow wastage of time for the young generation of any country, which includes the countries discussed above as well. It is imperative to make it clear to the masses that their children need to acquire education without wasting any time, because there are a number of countries which have historic ties and sympathy with militants for various reasons. If we take example of Afghanistan, it presents a situation where the country was ruled by Taliban for seven years. They are religiously fundamentalists. During their rule, playgrounds were used to execute criminals; the land was in dire straits economically. This situation presented an ideal opportunity for those with malicious

intentions to use them and their land. Taliban were the product of 1980s when they were used to defeat Soviets in Afghanistan with the help of the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. They were trained, equipped and religiously motivated to fight Soviets thus they achieved the assigned objectives. Then they were left alone in that lawless land without any economic and social development. Smuggling and poppy cultivation were almost the only sources of income for the country. With almost nonexistent schools and other social setup their youth had no option other than getting into all sorts of wrong practices like arms, drugs and militancy. But still, their effectiveness to carryout terror operations at a larger scale was questionable because they didn't have finances and they were not interested in any global terror operation. But Al Qaeda's need to recruit people to carryout terror operation and their ability to provide finances to the willing people made Afghanistan an ideal choice, especially because of the fact it would provide them a much needed sanctuary. Last but not the least; Afghan people remembered their role in defeating Soviet Army – then a superpower. Thus, they guessed this time with the blessing of Al Qaeda they would be defeating the infidels around the world.

Common people in Afghanistan do not consider Taliban or Al Qaeda morally wrong. The need is to educate them and show the real face of these fanatics who do not mind killing innocent civilians and children for their ill-conceived ideas, so that common public reject them. This has to be done in other trouble spots including Iraq and the north western bordering area of Afghanistan and Pakistan where Al Qaeda presumably hiding. When common citizens in those areas do not accept them as sincere, honest and expose them, they will have to either stop militancy or it will dissipate itself after their operatives leave the organization.

Media Perceptions in the US and Other Countries

“America is a large friendly dog in a very small room. Every time it wags its tail,
it knocks over a chair.”

Arnold Toynbee (British Historian)

“Just what is it that America stands for? If she stands for one thing more than
another it is for the sovereignty of self-governing people.”

Woodrow Wilson (28th US President)

After the tragic events of 9/11 certain global incidents were seen differently in and outside the US. There were reports that due to terrorists’ attacks on the US embassies, WTC (1993) and USS Cole the US was planning to invade Afghanistan to overthrow Taliban.³ But due to the events of 9/11 the US government could gather valuable domestic [public] support to carryout military action against Taliban in Afghanistan. Almost all countries supported then and the US with coalition forces attacked Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Ultimately in 2003, the US invaded Iraq also. The US media portrayed these wars as US triumphs against Taliban and Saddam, almost disregarding the civilian casualties during these wars, whereas the media in other countries had a much different perspective of these wars. Accounts of civilian deaths and injuries were shown on TV and newspapers all around the world. The Arab media was leading in such reporting. Technology had changed and it was not only TV and newspaper which actively participated in that campaign but internet and cell phones made their jobs easier by providing news on demand anytime anywhere. President Bush’s speech in which he defined Iran, Iraq and North Korea as “Axis of Evil” was taken very positively at home, he promised to “rid the world of evil” swept the masses at home with patriotic fervor.⁴ The speech was not taken quite in the same way elsewhere, including France and Germany. Obviously the “Axis of Evil” countries had their own take on this. For example in France a newspaper said, “Mr. Bush points out his latest enemies.” A German newspaper editorial called him “American Caesar.” Iranian media accused

him of “diverting international attention from Israeli support and oppression of Palestinian people.” North Korean media remarked it to be a “justification of the US military presence in South Korea.”⁵ Now, it becomes evident that the perception of the US President’s statement in and outside the US is almost opposite.

The important point is that people in different countries are suspicious of US Foreign Policy. Because, the US claims to be a just society with values and justice but a large number of people think its policies, while dealing with other countries, only sees its own interest; maybe at the cost of human values and justice. In 2003, The New York Times reported a survey by Time magazine. It said internationally how people rate different countries as a threat to the world peace. 7% said North Korea, 8% said Iraq and 84% said the US.⁶ The US since World War II has been involved in a number of regime changes and conflicts, overtly or covertly, around the world. The US role in Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, Cuba, El-Salvador, Colombia, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Congo/Zaire, East Timor, Haiti, Somalia, Libya, Grenada, Greece, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Italy Indonesia, Brazil, British Guiana/Guyana, Soviet Union, Middle East, Germany, Eastern Europe, Albania, Korea, Philippines, Marshall Islands, France, Japan, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan certainly involve civilian casualties or regime changes, which may have favorable public opinion at home but how they are seen in those regions needs to be analyzed.⁷ This paper will attempt to compare the US media and those countries’ media on the same subject to bring out the difference in perception and realities or at least the difference in perceptions.

Guatemala: William Blum in his book “Rogue States” writes that CIA-organized coup overthrew the democratically-elected government of Jacobo Arbenz, initiating 40 years’ cruelty, totaling 200,000 casualties – indisputably one of the most inhumane chapters of the 20th century.

The justification was that Guatemala had been on the verge of the proverbial Soviet take over. In actuality Russians had very little interest in that country and they even didn't maintain diplomatic relations. He further writes that in reality Arbenz had taken over some of the uncultivated land of the US firm, United Fruit Company, which had extremely close ties with American power elite. Moreover, Washington feared the spread of similar social-democracy to the other Latin American countries.⁸ William Blum's book has been read all around the world and in 2006 when Osama Bin Laden proposed Americans read his book, it became clear that the other populations are informed and think that anybody who is a critic of the US policies is right.

Blum wrote, "If Latin Americans shared the belief of radical Muslims that they will go directly to paradise for martyring themselves in the act of killing great Satan enemy, by now we might have had decades of repeated terrorist horrors coming from south of the border".⁹

Whereas, the US media, in those days, never brought out similar points in their reports. The New York Times in 1954 had been reporting news like, "J. Robert Oppenheimer, a leader of the US effort to build nuclear weapons, is holding back the development of hydrogen bomb and he is insufficiently loyal" (NYT, June, 17, 1954).¹⁰ The day after the Times reported the coup in Guatemala, it warned citizens to go off the road in case of an air attack, as now the Soviets have the hydrogen bomb and only hope for the city dwellers is to run off to countryside. The editorial showed a cartoon with communism as a rabid dog baring its fangs at the free world, which was a frightened looking horse. As the coup wound to its quick conclusion the next week, an air raid test was announced for the lower east side of the US. Almost every aspect of the American culture was penetrated by the fear of, "Reds under every bed".¹¹ It is evident that the press in mid 1950s pretty much shaped the public opinion and it might have had a say in policy making too.

After many decades it is quite clear that events in Guatemala were quite different from what was portrayed by the domestic media.

Afghanistan and Middle East: In the US, it is a general perception that the US supported the Afghan Mujahedeen to help them fight and push out Soviet military from their country.¹² Whereas people elsewhere have quite a different take on this, Zbigniew Brezezinski, National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter in an interview admitted that “the official story that the US gave military aid to Afghan Mujahedeen after the Soviet invasion in 1979 was a lie. “The truth was”, he said, “The US started aiding Mujahedeen six months before the Russians made their move.” He asserted that the Soviets will have military intervention in Afghanistan because of this aid and Carter acted on this. Brezezinski was asked if he regretted his decision and he said, “Regret what? The secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day Soviets crossed the border I wrote to President Carter: We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War. Indeed, for almost 10 years Moscow had to carry on a war unsupportable by the government, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.”¹³

The effect was breakup of Soviet empire remains a question, but it resulted in death, disability or migration of half the population of Afghanistan. Thousands of Islamic fundamentalists unleashed atrocities in numerous countries and the astounding repression of women in Afghanistan was instituted by America’s wartime ally. For playing a key role in causing all this Zbigniew Brezezinski has no regrets, rather he was downright proud of it. Blum called him ‘amoral’ and that he could have been ‘Zbigniew the Terrible’ in medieval times.¹⁴ I would further argue, even if all abovementioned consequences were unintended, yet Brezezinski

was asked about regretting his decision in retrospect, still he has no regrets and is proud of it. If the US had known about public opinion in the region it would have taken different approach before hastily going into that operation, for example when the US told Pakistan that military and economic aid will be restored if Pakistan join the great crusade, only a month before the Soviet intervention, anti American mobs had burnt and ransacked US embassy in Islamabad and American Culture Centers in two other cities.¹⁵ Although the Military government of Zia ul Haq decided to side with the America but not everyone in Pakistan was bought out.

The independent daily newspaper “The Muslim” more than once accused the US of being ready to “fight to the last Afghan. We are not flattered to be termed a ‘frontline state’ by Washington. Washington does not seem to be in any mood to seek an early settlement of a war whose benefits it is reaping at no cost of American manpower.”¹⁶ Now it is important to see that the public opinion and media both were against the US policies but the US had not much clue of that. That was the time of state owned TV networks; common people would get independent news from press mostly. Had it been today, when in a developing countries like Pakistan, which has dozens satellite news channels broadcasting news 24/7, it could have had a much different story of the US covert involvement in Mujahedeen’s support against the Soviets because the public and the press both had a very clear sense of what was going on. The only thing missing was a powerful media of today to deliver a powerful message like daily newspaper “The Muslims” then gave.

In an interview Madeleine Albright was asked by Lesley Stahl about the results of the US sanctions on Iraq, “We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And – you know, is the price worth it?” Replied Albright, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.” Blum argues

that given the absolute benefit of any doubt that she had to defend the administration's policies, but knowing well before that she will be an integral part of ongoing policies, she took the job. She knew that she will be defending the policies without apology and expected to be rewarded for such unquestioning loyalty.¹⁷ The above examples are the proof of general public's opinion of the US military operations and diplomatic policies. For an ordinary citizen of any country losing a loved one means an irreparable loss regardless of the US government's labeling it collateral damage for achieving its foreign policy objectives or national interests.

Ironically the actions have spoken louder than words; people argue that US operations around the world have resulted in huge number of civilian casualties. Sometimes it is way out of proportion; like in case of 9/11 US casualties were around 3,000, whereas more than 100,000 civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq and around 5,000 or so US military personnel have been killed. This brings people to a point where they question the morality of the only super power in the world which claims to be the flag bearer of human rights. Blum in his book *Killing Hope* said, "Well, if one were to write a book called 'The American Empire for Dummies', page one should say: Don't even look for the moral factor. US foreign policy has no moral factor built into its DNA. One must clear one's mind of that baggage which only gets in the way of seeing beyond the clichés and the platitudes."¹⁸ It seems to be an exaggeration but then there are other sources, media and press which are not US and especially those in Middle East and other Muslim countries, who would have similar opinion. The statements of US and allies' leaders sometimes make others skeptical about the morality factor in the US operations, like British diplomat and advisor to Prime Minister Tony Blair, Robert Cooper wrote:

"The Challenge of the postmodern world is to get used to the idea of double standards. When dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself."

“His expression every state for itself, can be better understood as any state not willing to accede to the agenda of American Empire school bully’s best friend in London.”¹⁹ After a statement like this goes on air in other parts of the world, one could imagine what would be the public opinion about US lead War on Terrorism.

Afghanistan and Iraq: Sept 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Center (WTC) twin towers and Pentagon shocked the whole world because of the live coverage of the second impact and destruction caused by those attacks. Attacks on WTC, US embassies and Warships had occurred before, but four airliners hi-jacked and slammed into buildings, killing thousands of people and having the US felt its vulnerability by getting hit on its symbolic structures. In less than a month the US planes were bombing Al Qaeda hideouts and Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Public opinion in the US overwhelmingly favored the US on its war in Afghanistan. Most of the other countries supported the US on this war, mostly because they wanted to bandwagon the super power and show solidarity on war against those who planned and executed such heinous attacks. Media had its role to play on this overwhelming support to the US by keeping the people of the world inform in the remotest corners of the world. Thus the US was able to create one of the biggest military coalitions in the history. But after one year the situation changed and it kept changing with time. Now in the year 2009 the situation is far different from what it was in Oct, 2001 as far as public and other governments’ support is concerned.

The US offered a reward of \$ 25 million for the capture of Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omer. Eight million leaflets were dropped over Afghanistan telling people about the atrocities of their previous regime and Al Qaeda as well as the US message of friendship with a common Afghan. Al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners were taken to Guantanamo Bay prison. Commando solo aircraft deployed to broadcast the US message. Taliban had banned TV in Afghanistan and most

of Afghans had not seen the twin towers falling. The US soldiers explained them why they were there and not like the previous Russian invaders but to seek justice against crimes committed against the US.²⁰ But ironically it was Al Qaeda's invaders, not the Afghans, who controlled their country and the native people were innocent. Taliban capitalized on airing their point of view via Qatar based satellite channel "Al-Jazeera". Technically they were ahead of London by five hours and Washington by ten, which was a disadvantage to the coalition forces. Taliban were able to launch their propaganda earlier and the coalition was defensively responding until the formation of coalition information center in London, Washington and most crucially in Islamabad that reversed the situation.²¹ But the damage was done, rumors of 4,000 Jews not coming to office at the WTC on the morning of attacks, the attacks were really a CIA-Mossad conspiracy and Palestinians celebrating the attacks were shown in the western media including CNN. Although the Palestinian celebration was footage of the Gulf War I.

The White House tried to deny Americans from reaching the enemy's point of view in an attempt to stop potential Bin Laden's coded message to reach the terrorists. This, too, provided the opponents 'evidence' about western hypocrisy about claiming to promote democratic values, such as freedom of speech.²² After eight years in Afghanistan the war is still on and nature of war is changing from one way to another. At the moment Afghanistan is hardly controlled by Hamid Karzai's government and there is a large International Security Assistance Force which will very soon have another compliment of 20,000 to 30,000 more troops joining them. The US forces had tremendous initial success in Afghanistan but the insurgency could not be controlled, Al Qaeda operatives have crossed the borders and spread in other neighboring countries especially in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan – a rugged mountainous terrain which is very difficult to reach. The US armed UAVs are hitting targets in that bordering

region but it has stirred the feeling of Pakistani population due to civilian deaths. Pakistani government and media have denounced US attack and termed them as attacks on its sovereignty. Pakistani government has at a number of times asserted that these attacks are not helping achieve the cause of war on terror. As long as the local population in the mountainous area sympathizes with the terrorist the job will not be over. The only concern people of the region have is the civilian deaths, because there were not many suicide attacks in Pakistan before Pakistan moved its own forces in the troubled region to hunt down terrorist, which was taken as an open support by Pakistan to the US. Pakistani leaders, which include Ex President Musharraf in an interview to CNN in Jan 2009, have emphasized that the strategy is to get rid of terrorist but it's the tactics we differ from that of the US.

Project for New American Century (PNAC) included Bush Administration's VP Dick Cheney, Sec Def Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Sec Def Paul Wolfowitz put forward a document "Rebuilding America's Defenses". Its major goal was global dominance in the new millennium; the major objective was the US presence in the Gulf region which transcended the issue of Saddam Hussein's regime.²³ Richard Parle, a senior advisor to Donald Rumsfeld, in 2002 indicated that war on Iraq was imminent. The only thing to stop the war could be regime change. On the other hand Colin Powell at the UN in 2003, at a number of times, claimed that Iraq possessed WMDs with solid proofs and graphic data and made the case for war on Iraq to the global audience.²⁴ There was huge international opposition to the proposed US attack on Iraq. On Feb 13, 2003, eight million people around the world demonstrated against the Bush Administration plan. In a speech at West Point President Bush proclaimed a new "doctrine" that the United States would strike first against enemies.²⁵ William Galston in 2002 argued:

“A global strategy based on the new Bush doctrine of pre-emption means the end of the system of international institutions, laws and norms that we have worked for more than half a century. What is at stake is nothing less than a fundamental shift in America’s place in the world. Rather than continuing to serve as first among equals in the post-war international systems, the United States would act as a law unto itself, creating new rules of international engagement without the consent of other nations. In my judgment, this new stance would ill serve the long-term interests of the United States.”²⁶

Ultimately in March-May 2003, the US succeeded in Iraq’s invasion with supporting coalition of the willing. As mentioned earlier, the major points were to find and destroy Iraq’s WMDs and to liberate Iraqis from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. The coalition forces were, quite swiftly, able to defeat Saddam and take control of Iraq but the WMDs were never found. Since then insurgency in Iraq has made it a quagmire for the US and coalition countries and the money spent in Iraq and Afghanistan has contributed to the current US/global financial crises.

As a matter of fact there are a lot of problems started after the military victory in Iraq, like media all around the world questioned the US legitimacy of attacking Iraq keeping in view the absence of WMDs, Iraqi invasion without the UN consent,²⁷ collateral damage, absence of Saddam and Iran as a regional player with ongoing nuclear program, exposure of the US limitation as a sole superpower to control insurgency after years of operation, the US deterrence to the countries like Russia, China, North Korea, Venezuela etc. gets a blow for the future keeping in view the finances needed to support such wars and the current financial situation. All of the mentioned points surfaced in the international media at one time or the other, whereas the US media, when compared to European, Middle Eastern and the Asian media was not in sync. Apart from the cultural context some of the mainstream US media reported differently because of patriotism factor. Even in the US there were different opinions of Iraq war between CNN, Fox News, ABC News etc. similarly the print media was divided in their reporting.

UK was the biggest supporter of the Bush Doctrine of pre-emption but the media in UK was quite skeptical about Iraq war and put utmost importance to acquiring UN consent. In September 2002, issued a dossier focusing the Iraqi possession of WMDs and made it a central issue. Ultimately failure of the UN resolution process caught the UK media attention, also to the Blair government's shifting stance from WMDs and UN resolution to morality of the war to liberate Iraqi people. This change in behavior made the right wing media ambiguous about the Blair government and the left wing media opposed the potential war on principle.²⁸

Other international media had varying view of the event, while the US networks framed the event as "Operation Iraqi Freedom" or "War in Iraq" the Canadian CBS used the logo "War on Iraq" and various Arab networks presented it as an "invasion" and "occupation".²⁹ Another example is of Spain which is considered as an ally by the US and its media, but support for US invasion of Iraq was confined to Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar who was isolated outside his own political party for his support to the US. He influenced state owned and a few corporate media to air supportive arguments in favor of war but the independent networks openly expressed Spanish opposition to the invasion. In March 2004, at the time of parliamentary elections which coincided with the train station bombing and government's disinformation campaign, Spanish working people were transmitting their opinion via e-mail and cell phones. "There were millions of text messages ... An effective anti-lie and counter-disinformation network was established, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people whose votes assured the victory of the Socialist Worker's Party and its candidate for Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero."³⁰

The US made a lot of effort to move international public opinion in its favor but it did not turn out to be very successful. In 2003, for example, the US government spent \$600 million on

public diplomacy programs with intentions to enhance its image abroad, it spent additional \$100 million to directly target the Middle East and it spent \$540 million on international broadcasting, Voice of America, Radio and TV Marti, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, WorldNet, Radio Farda and Radio Sawa (Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World).³¹

Bush Administration's appointment of Charlotte Beers as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, a newly created post, in a hope that she would be able to positively influence the Middle Eastern youth with the US consumer and popular culture which was one of the reasons of the Soviets' demise. Beers attempted to engage the target audience emotionally rather than discursively, with one of the first initiatives to rename Voice of America to Radio Sawa (Radio together in Arabic), which mixed American music with popular Arab music interspersed after each other to counter the local media. She also tried to create a US satellite TV – Middle Eastern TV Network to compete with Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia. Her other initiatives were people to people video profile "Shared Values" for airing in the region and a magazine "Hi" aimed at the young people. In the long run due to other news from other networks regarding FBI interrogations of Arab Americans, Guantanamo Bay prison, US deportations and new visa restrictions lost credibility as a result Arab youth found it boring and propagandistic. Ultimately she resigned in March 2003, and her critics claimed that she failed miserably while her defenders argue that she was not given enough time and resources. Even the Bush Administration accepted that public diplomacy had failed in the Middle East.³²

Her predecessor Margaret Tutwiler remained on this position for only three months. There were big hopes attached with her because of her government public relation background but she left office, to join a position at the New York Stock Exchange, just as the first images of

Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse were becoming public.³³ Since then this position has been filled by three more people thrice without any one in the office ranging six months to one year.³⁴

Bush Administration also launched “Al Hurra” (the free one) satellite TV network to counter Arab networks but it was not really possible for this network to survive in the face of existing Arab and even Western networks like Al Arabia, Al Jazeera, CNN, BBC, MTV, VH 1, Paramount Channel, Orbit News, Sky News etc. There was a perception that exposure of American culture will cultivate desire for American goods and American way of life. This worked in case of former Soviet Union but it proved wrong in the Middle East. The West has had a powerful and largely exploitive presence in the Middle East for centuries. People in the Middle East knew Americans and the US corporations, their dual wage standards for Western and regional employees had provided its own brand of “person to person” counter-diplomacy.³⁵

Media War: New Trends

During both OEF and OIF the media war continued and intensified overtime. Western media was a little surprised by the new Arab media which was independent and very liberal in their reporting. Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia which are based in Qatar and UAE respectively, started airing their side of the story about these two wars from the beginning. Al-Jazeera, initially, was broadcasting in Arabic and targeting the Arab audience but later it started English broadcast and spread globally with its English network head office in Washington. What made people more wary was that a number of reporters from the western networks like CNN, BBC and ABC etc. quit their jobs here and joined Al-Jazeera.³⁶ The other aspect was Al-Jazeera’s access to Taliban and Al Qaeda in the initial portion of OEF and it broadcasted Taliban’s messages and also Osama Bin Laden’s taped speeches, which were even shown by the western mainstream media over and over with the courtesy of Al-Jazeera. Therefore it can be said that this gave voice to the

enemy in an unprecedented way. Al-Jazeera showed graphic footage of the wars and the US thought it to be objectionable, accused them for doing so in a quest to drum up the viewership and to propagandize against the US.³⁷ The US was afraid of losing the information war, tried to influence Emir of Qatar to tone down its coverage which was not agreed upon by Emir but accepted to share, with the US authorities, any Al Qaeda tapes before airing them.

People in the US press suggested that dealing with Al-Jazeera should be the military's responsibility because Al-Jazeera was poisoning the minds. Al-Jazeera offices in Kabul and Baghdad were attacked which resulted in death of its reporter Tarek Ayyoub. Although the US military did not accept the first attack was a deliberate attempt but in retrospect, whatever the case may be, it only increased the popularity of the network.³⁸ After Al-Jazeera aired the interviews of capture US soldiers and the bodies of the dead US soldiers it was taken to task by the US media, in Spain its reporter was detained for some time for alleged connection with Al Qaeda. The US skepticism was due to fear of Arab and international public opinion swaying away from the US, loosen the coalition and affect the public support.³⁹ Al Jazeera itself does not accept the allegation of propaganda against the US:

“We worry about how we treat the news. We just don't take any tape that comes to our office or to the station and put it on air. Before that we have a meeting to discuss how we should treat the news, and not be the subject to the propaganda from a party or organization or group, Osama Bin Laden, others. When we aired the tape of Bin Laden's spokesman Suleiman Abu Geith, directly after that we brought Edward Walker, former US assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, for his comments, and after that a Muslim cleric to talk from an Islamic perspective about bin Laden's statements, to raise points such as that Islam doesn't allow you to kill innocent people, that bin Laden will condemn American bombings but at the same time give orders to kill innocent Americans. To air the statement without any comments, without any opposing statements or viewpoints or analysis, that's when it is propaganda.”⁴⁰

Now, such statements show rationale and critical thinking makes a network credible, especially a network which was handled wrongly by physically attacking its offices in different cities and pressurized through influential people will only add to the popularity. In this age of

information technology and networking crude methods of using force do not work. If it's about hearts and minds than the method to engage the enemy has to be very thoughtful, which should be considered sensitive and delicate. For example months of IO Campaign can go wrong by graphic images as that of an isolated Abu Ghraib incident, which now we know that had strategic consequences. Even during his farewell speeches President George W. Bush mentioned one of the sour points in his eight years presidency was Abu Ghraib incident. Consequently planning an attack or destabilizing a news network today is not a very good idea.

The way Ahead

After analyzing the contemporary situation in managing risk while engaging media it is very important for the DoD and the Air Force to apply efforts in the right direction. For example using domestic media TV, Press or the internet will help have supportive public opinion – helpful for the government and troops to have domestic support. But the US operations are overseas and in an environment which are different from the US. Culture plays a vital role in winning the hearts and minds for public support. The US government has attempted to apply many methods to do the abovementioned job, it spent millions of dollars, employed some competent people who experimented in different ways to win the hearts and minds but the results were not really favorable. What comes to mind is that in today's era of transparency even the undemocratic governments have a hard time convincing people to tow their line. TV networks with their live shows bring politicians of opposite parties and discuss matters of national and international significance. These tools were not available in past and especially in smaller and non democratic countries ruler would get away with anything. Now people question as to what the governments are doing in people's interest and they want truth to be told to them. May be established democracies like the US had this for a longer period, but this was not the case in the

rest of the world. But with the progressive media today leaders and governments are answerable to citizens. It is difficult to tell the people, “do as I say, not as I do.”

The US sees itself differently from the way other countries see it. There is a cultural disconnect, it has to be removed and understood. The disconnect is so much that the perception of the US government and the military was that by liberating Afghans and Iraqi people they will be embraced with open hands. But, for the common people loss of lives of innocent civilians – the near and dear ones is all for them to hate another country or its military. Perceptual difference was again on display when President Bush on his farewell visit to Iraq received different response from what he would have thought from Iraqi reporters and media. In past one might get away with military actions due to informational delays, but now the superiority of the news with respect to time and quality, it is impossible for any military to get away with any action which provoke or hurt feelings.

The important thing is to align the message from the top office to the last soldier in the theatre. Like it happened in the past when the civilian leadership was saying something else and the military leadership was saying something else, which very easily hurts the cause. Public Affairs cannot be performed in isolation from the overall big picture of the US government. Also, tackling of the adversary's population is also to tackle the part of their propaganda's big picture, not an isolated town or a village. Media revolution has made it simple for the lowest person of both sides to have news of tactical, operational or strategic level. Synchronizing messages from top leadership to the lowest soldier is all the more important. It is easy said than done but the right things are hard to achieve, the picture is not as bleak, there are a number steps taken in right direction like the US armed forces personnel being taught other languages, working with other countries in other regions like Afghanistan, trying to strengthen Iraqi Army

and security forces and gradually taking step back from this region. Recent interview of newly elected president Obama to Arab news channel Al-Arabia is a positive step in which he made it clear to the Arab world in particular and the rest of the world in general that the US has no mal intentions against Muslims or any other nation of the world. Thus shying away from other media is not the answer but to engage them is the key to success.

This will not bring results overnight, so patience is extremely important. The US help to countries hit by tsunami, earthquake relief in Pakistan are recent reminders of the US fairness and values, which does not require any IO Campaign. But again for military that operation, that environment and that region is important. The point to remember is when we carry out any military operation we think we are doing the right thing, but the people in that region may not think like that. The relief efforts of the past help build goodwill and in general approval ratings of the US improve overtime. Which in turn persuade the masses to have favorable opinion, on the contrary if we do not have a favorable opinion then whatever we do people will doubt its fairness of cause. So any good action done anywhere in the world will help improve the image of the US armed forces, may it be a naval ships' flag showing visit or air force planes' joint exercises or participation in air shows or disaster relief operations.

Conclusion

The US global interest and operations need to be successful to serve its national interests, since World War II the US has been involved in a number of military operations and regime changes around the world. In parallel technology has been evolving and changing in all spheres, which include military hardware on one side to information technology on the other side. As seen in this paper that news evolved from print media to radio to TV to internet and now cell phones, has been a major component of shaping public opinion all around the world. As today

we are living in exponential times, the Western advantage of difference in people's access to the news has almost gone away. A citizen in remotest part of the world may have news brought to him as quickly as to a citizen in the US or Europe, which was not the case before the advent of satellite TV, internet and cell phones. The proof is that CNN, BBC and likes of them which had the monopoly in the news business are indebted to other networks like Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabia, IBN India, Geo and Dawn News Pakistan etc for their help in regional news, mostly live coverage of certain events.

As a common citizen in a third world country is more informed today than what he used to be twenty years ago, has brought a lot of change in the way of thinking of world leaders on domestic and international issues. As it has become difficult for the civilian leadership to sway public opinion in hostile regions in their favor it has become difficult for a military commander and Public Affairs personnel in similar fashion to tell their story to the target audience. Incidents like Abu Ghraib, which would have gone unnoticed in WW II, Korea or Vietnam or even in Gulf War I, made a huge impact on the US image – courtesy cell phone camera, Text/multi-media messaging and satellite TV. The US would have to think about new ways for its future foreign policy, because involvement in OEF and OIF versus economic meltdown at home versus the cost of military operations versus the masses all around the world know all this on daily basis leaves it as a choice to pick up certain operation judging the future reaction of foreign media, public and the domestic reaction will be of key importance. The US is the oldest democracy and proponent of value of human life and dignity will have to choose how it is going to tell people around the world as to what is good and what is bad. Other media would need to be intelligently used to spread own word to not only own masses but to those where the operations take place. As discussed earlier that the US population is around 300 million as compared to Muslims and

Hindus who are more than a billion each, as most of the operations historically and currently also are going on in that region then engaging them is more important than engaging own population because own population would be swayed easily due to patriotism and natural support to own troops. But this isn't the only way to achieve success in a military operation.

Notes

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- ¹ Nye, "Paradox of American Power", 138.
 - ² McCormick. "The Military-Media Relationship", 25.
 - ³ Special Reports, "We already had plans to invade Afghanistan", 1.
 - ⁴ Paul, Richard and Elder, Linda. "How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda", 18.
 - ⁵ Ibid, 9.
 - ⁶ Ibid, 27.
 - ⁷ Blum, William. "Rouge State", 163-236.
 - ⁸ Ibid, 169.
 - ⁹ Ibid, 36.
 - ¹⁰ <http://www.newspetry.com/1999/991226.htm>
 - ¹¹ Ibid.
 - ¹² Whisenhunt, Mary E. Answering Al-Qaeda, 31.
 - ¹³ Blum, William. "Rouge State", 6.
 - ¹⁴ Ibid, 6.
 - ¹⁵ Blum, William. Killing Hope, 344.
 - ¹⁶ Ibid, 344.
 - ¹⁷ Blum, William. "Rouge State", 6.
 - ¹⁸ Blum, William. Killing Hope, 388.
 - ¹⁹ Blum, William. Killing Hope, 389.
 - ²⁰ Taylor, Philip M. Munitions of hearts and minds, 316
 - ²¹ Ibid, 317.
 - ²² Ibid, 319.
 - ²³ Kamalipour, Yahya R. Bring 'Em On. xii.
 - ²⁴ Ibid. xiii.
 - ²⁵ Ibid. viii.
 - ²⁶ Ibid. xi.
 - ²⁷ Blum, William. Killing Hope, 390.
 - ²⁸ Tumber, Howard and Palmer, Jerry. Media at War, 90.
 - ²⁹ Kamalipour, Yahya R. Bring 'Em On. xv.
 - ³⁰ Ibid, 13.
 - ³¹ Ibid, 51.
 - ³² Ibid, 59.
 - ³³ Ibid, 60.
 - ³⁴ <http://www.nndp.com/gov/357/000131961/>
 - ³⁵ Kamalipour, Yahya R. Bring 'Em On, 61.
 - ³⁶ <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Al-Jazeera-international>
 - ³⁷ Zayani, Mohamed. The Al Jazeera Phenomenon, 24.
 - ³⁸ Ibid, 25.
 - ³⁹ Ibid, 24.
 - ⁴⁰ Ibid, 26.

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